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ABSTRACT

A study explored reasons chosen by adults for returning to college and their perceptions of their attainment by reviewing the literature and surveying graduates of an off-campus degree program. Review of prior studies led to the expectation that there would be two main groups of reasons: job-related and personal enrichment. Baccalaureate degree in liberal education (BLS) graduates of the College of Liberal Studies, a unit of the University of Oklahoma, were surveyed using a specially developed BLS Program Review Questionnaire--BLS Graduates. The instrument surveyed demographic and motivational data of adult students, with two scaled questions selected for factor analysis: (1) importance of certain goals at time subject decided to obtain degree and (2) goals reached by obtaining the degree. Subparts of these questions were identifed as components of one of three factors--personal enrichment reasons, expectations of new career or degree changes, and expectations of present job changes. Results of regression analysis confirmed that those who sought one of these three specific changes reported that change as a result of participation in the degree program. A preferred explanation for this finding was that the degree program, flexible and individualistic, could respond successfully to any number of individual goals. (YLB)

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SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE LIFELONG LEARNING RESEARCH CONFERENCE

A MOTIVATIONAL TYPOLOGY FOR ADULTS RETURNING TO COLLEGE

1980

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Introduction

Adult college enrollment increased by about 50% between 1960 and 1970 (Roelfs, 1975) and by 63% between 1970 and 1974 (Stampen, 1976). This increasing rate is expected to continue as the general population grows older. Although adult students have been present in increasing numbers as undergraduate students for some time, our institutions have generally responded to them as if they had the same motives, needs, and goals as the traditional undergraduate. With the recent legitimacy of the concept of lifelong learning, postsecondary institutions have begun to develop programs for their adult students. However, little is known about what the returning adult is seeking from the educational experience. To date few studies have examined the reason for returning to college.

The purpose of this study was to explore reasons chosen by adults for returning to college and their perceptions of their attainment. It was expected that the reasons would factor into two main groups: job-related reasons and personal enrichment reasons. Participants who entered college for job-related reasons would report more positive job-related changes. Participants who sought personal fulfillment in college would rate the intellectual content higher.

Review of the Literature

The earliest national poll of adult learning interests was taken thirty-five years ago by the American Institute of Public Opinion and reported in the Adult Education Journal, 1945. Thirty-four percent of the total adult population indicated that they would like to enroll in adult education schools. The majority of those interested in going back to school were interested not in commercial or vocational training but "want training of a more ambitious nature, along professional, scientific, or artistic lines, such as law, engineering, psychology, social welfare." (Adult Education Journal, 1945)

In 1962 Johnstone and Rivera, using a checklist method, explored reasons adults gave for participating in educational activities. For those participating in educational activities 37% reported personal enrichment reasons and 36% reported job-related reasons. Job-related studies were more important to men, young adults, and lower socioeconomic status learners, while personal enrichment reasons were more important to older adults, women, and higher socioeconomic learners. (Johnstone

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and Rivera, 1965) Carp, Peterson and Roelfs reported results from a national survey conducted ten years later. Learning interests among currently enrolled adults were similar to the Johnstone and Rivera study with 55% indicating personal enrichment reasons and 18% indicating job-related reasons. Age and socioeconomic differences supported the earlier study. (Carp et al, 1974).

Another inquiry which has become a landmark study and the object of further investigation was conducted by Houle (1961). Twenty-two adults identified as continuing learners were selected by Houle and his staff for an interview. These adult learners were categorized into three groups. Houle labeled the learners as: goal-oriented, who use education as a means of accomplishing clear cut goals; activity-oriented, who seem to enjoy the activity involved; and learning-oriented, who seek knowledge for its own sake.

Houle's study was followed by Sheffield who tested Houle's findings on 483 adults attending an educational conference. Sheffield then identified five principal components which he called orientations to learning:

1. learning orientation- seeking knowledge for its own sake;
2. desire-activity orientation- taking part because in the circumstances of the learning and interpersonal or social meaning is found which may have no necessary connection at all with the content of the announced purposes of the activity;
3. personal-goal orientation- participating in education to accomplish fairly clear-cut personal objectives;
4. societal-goal orientation- participating in education to accomplish clear-cut social or community objectives; and
5. need-activity orientation- taking part because in the circumstances of learning an introspective or intrapersonal meaning is found which may have no necessary connection, and often no connection at all, with the announced purpose of the activity (Sheffield, 1962).

Boshier, in a study conducted in New Zealand, attempted to develop Houle's typology further and to formulate an adult educational participation model that had cross-cultural generality. (Boshier, 1971) Using factor analysis Boshier identified three major orientations to learning which were: social-oriented, job or vocationally-oriented, and learning or education-oriented.

Burgess tested 1046 part-time adult students in the St. Louis area using an instrument that gave seventy possible reasons for participation. (Burgess, 1971) Using factor analysis, he identified eight groups of reasons:

1. the desire to know;
2. the desire to reach a personal goal;
3. the desire to reach a social goal;
4. the desire to take part in social activity;

5. the desire to escape some other activity or situation;
6. the desire to comply with requirements;
7. the desire to comply with pressures exerted by relatives, friends, and society; and
8. the desire to study alone. (Burgess, 1971)

Morstain and Smart replicated Boshier's New Zealand study in the United States. (Morstain and Smart, 1974) The study had two purposes: 1) to determine the similarity or the motivational patterns when viewed in a cross cultural context, and 2) to determine if there were significant differences in expressed reasons for participation when adult learners were categorized by selected demographic variables. Six factors were identified:

1. Social Relationships
2. External Expectations
3. Social Welfare
4. Professional Advancement
5. Escape/Stimulation
6. Cognitive Interest

The six factors were analyzed by demographic variables using stepwise multiple discriminant analysis. Women were defined as those taking courses for social relationships and for escape/stimulation reasons. Men were defined as seeking educational experiences for social relationships and for external expectations. For both sexes taking educational courses for social relationships decreased with increasing age.

In a later study Morstain and Smart (1977) used the same instrument (Education Participation Scale) to develop typology groups of adults from an analysis of individual motivational profiles. From a sample of 648 adult learners five major groups were identified. The scores clustered into five groups. Group I (N=324) were found not to have clear reasons for their educational activities and were called non-directed. Approximately 55% of the non-directed learners were female, and about 54% were under the age of 30, 51% had a family annual income of less than $12,000.

Group II (N=55) sought the educational experience because of opportunities for social relationships. Fifty-six percent of Group II were female; 72% were under age 30, and 71% were from families with incomes less than $12,000 per year.

Group III (N=35) scored high on the escape/stimulation seeking scale. This group was 74% female, 46% were under 30, 26% were between 30 and 40; and 18% were over 40; and 47% were from families with per annum incomes of more than $15,000.

Group IV (N=155) scored high on the career oriented scale. Fifty-eight percent were male, ages 21 to 50 were represented fairly evenly with a slight larger per-

centage below age 30, with about 50% having family incomes less than $12,000 and 50% with family incomes more than $12,000.

Group V (N=57) scored high on life change (indicating a strong desire to change social-personal interactions). This group was 57% male, 70% under age 30, and 62% from families with incomes of $8,500 to $15,000 yearly.

Procedure

The Sample. The sample was composed of graduates of the College of Liberal Studies (CLS), which is a unit of the University of Oklahoma offering baccalaureate (BLS) and master's degrees (MLS) in liberal education to adult students. Established in 1961, the CLS offers interdisciplinary study through instructional procedures which are flexible and adapted to the individual student in terms of time, location, and sequence.

A survey instrument designed by the authors entitled, BLS Program Review Questionaire - BLS Graduates, was mailed to 511 graduates of the College of Liberal Studies. Fifty-nine percent or 301 responded.

The age range of the responding sample was 26 to 73 with both a median and mean age of 49. Males represented 74% and females represented 26% of the sample. Eighty-five percent were married and 75% were employed full-time. The vast majority (77%) reported their occupations as either professional/technical or managers/administrators. Thirty percent reported individual income to be more than $30,000/yr and 48% reported family income to be more than $30,000 yearly.

The survey was conducted for two reasons: 1) for a general evaluation of the degree program and 2) to find out more about CLS students and graduates in order to develop educational experiences that are more responsive to the students needs.

The Methodology, An instrument was developed to survey the BLS graduates that would give both demographic and motivational data for adult students participating in an undergraduate degree program. Reasons for participating were adapted from a survey instrument used by the National Institute of Education in a national survey of nontraditional degree programs. (Sosdian and Sharp, 1978).

Validity of the instrument was tested by having a group of graduating students complete the survey form and give the developers feedback about clarity of questions and relevance to educational goals. Reliability was established by using scale analysis. Scale internal consistency was demonstrated by coefficient alphas of .75 and .70.

Two scaled questions were selected for factor analysis. Both questions used identical sub-parts. For example, sub-parts a-k were written identically in each

question. The first question is listed below:

How important to you were the following goals at the time you decided to obtain this degree from the College of Liberal Studies? (Check one box for each goal.)

1. Not important
2. Somewhat important
3. Important
4. Very important
5. Extremely important

GOALS	1	2	3	4	5
a. To improve my chances of good pay and/or promotion in my career	___	___	___	___	___
b. To obtain the credential which would make me eligible to receive the right pay for the work I already was (am) doing	___	___	___	___	___
c. To develop a new career	___	___	___	___	___
d. To improve my job skills and my ability to perform my work	___	___	___	___	___
e. To obtain the credential which would qualify me for the kind of jobs I really wanted	___	___	___	___	___
f. To learn more about the subject area simply because I was interested in it	___	___	___	___	___
g. To feel the enjoyment and have the experience of learning on my own	___	___	___	___	___
h. To have the satisfaction of having the degree	___	___	___	___	___
i. To obtain prerequisites for entry into a higher level degree program (e.g., master's, professional, etc.)	___	___	___	___	___
j. To meet new friends and/or stimulating teachers	___	___	___	___	___
k. To become a more interesting person	___	___	___	___	___

The second question was:

Which, if any of the following goals were REACHED by obtaining this degree? (Check one box for each goal.)

1. Not a goal
2. Undecided
3. Not reached
4. Reached

A through K were the same sub-parts as listed in the above question.

Results. Using the SPSS Factor Analysis Program[1] on the data, three factors were identified. Only those factors with eigenvalue of one or more were used. The goals factor as listed below:

Factor I (Eigenvalue: 3.19; Pct. of variance: 29)[2]

f. To learn more about the subject area simply because I was interested in it

g. To feel the enjoyment and have the experience of learning on my own

j. To meet new friends and/or stimulating teachers

k. To become a more interesting person

Factor II (Eigenvalue: 2.42; Pct. of variance: 22)

c. To develop a new career

e. To obtain the credential which would qualify me for the kind of jobs I really wanted

i. To obtain prerequisites for entry into a higher level degree program (e.g., master's professional, etc.)

Factor III (Eigenvalue: 1.07; pct. of variance: 9.7)

a. To improve my chances of good pay and/or promotion in my career

b. To obtain the credential which would make me eligible to receive the right pay for the work I already was (am) doing

h. To have the satisfaction of having the degree

Based on the nature of the items Factor I was labeled Personal Enrichment Reasons, Factor II was labeled Expectations of New Career or Degree Changes, and Factor III was labeled Expectations of Present Job Changes. In the second question, Goals Reached, Factor I was labeled Attained Personal Enrichment, Factor II was labeled Attained Present Job Changes, and Factor III was labeled Attained New Career or Degree Changes.

A regression analysis was then run using the factors to predict changes which resulted from the degree program. The result of the regression analysis showed that those who sought present job changes as a result of the degree program reported present job changes. The regression analysis predicted this, accounting for 42% of the variance. Those who sought new job or career changes reported changes to new jobs or degree programs as a result of participation in the degree program. The regression analysis predicted this, accounting for 61% of the variance. Those who sought

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[1] The SPSS package program produces a factor matrix, a varimax rotated factor matrix (orthogonal), and a transformation matrix.

[2] A purity value of 60/40 was used in determining variable clusters.

the degree for personal enrichment reasons reported reaching personal enrichment goals as a result of participation in the degree program. The regression analysis predicted this, accounting for 37% of the variance.

Discussion

This is a study of graduates or survivors of an off campus degree program. Demographic data show that this sample represents predominantly white, middle class, middle-aged male adults. The findings generally support those studies that take such demographic data into account.

These data support the Johnstone and Rivera study (1962) and the Carp et al study (1974) which showed that adults participated in educational activities for personal enrichment reasons and job-related reasons and that older adults and higher socioeconomic status adults participated for personal enrichment reasons.

Houle's research also appears to be supported in part by this study when he categorizes learners into goal oriented, which could be the same as career-oriented, learning-oriented, which could be the same as personal enrichment, and activity-oriented for which this study had no clear cluster of learners. Boshier also identified three major orientations to learning: social, job-related, and education oriented. (Boshier, 1971)

Taking into account Burgess' caveat that the content of the questions determine kinds of factors, the many factors seen by Sheffield, Boshier, Burgess, and Morstain and Smart did not emerge. One explanation for only three factors emerging can be found in the design of the survey instrument. Another explanation can be found in the homogeneity of the respondents.

Studies by Morstain and Smart which replicated Boshier's studies found six to eight clusters. Although many of the factors are parallel to the three factors found in this study, the findings of this study did not generally support their findings.

The regression analysis would confirm that those who entered the program for specific goals reported reaching those goals. Several explanations are possible for this finding. One explanation may be found in the theories of social psychology such as cognitive dissonance or attribution theories. Another explanation that is preferred by the authors is that the degree program, being highly flexible and individualistic, could easily respond successfully to any member of individual goals.

Conclusions

This study was conducted by the College of Liberal Studies staff for program evaluation purposes. A likely conclusion is that the program meets the needs of the

graduates (the successful student). Additional data are needed on two groups of students not presently being served. The educationally underserved as described by Cross (1979) which include minorities, the elderly, and low socioeconomic groups are not approaching the College in significant numbers. However, presently enrolled students do represent about fifty percent women. More information is needed on the reasons these students are not enrolling.

Another group, the drop-outs from the program, obviously aren't being served. Gathering information on the expectations of incoming students would give valuable information for programs and curriculum planners. In addition data from exit interviews would be useful in determining areas of weakness in the program.

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